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House of Representatives

The House met at 10 a.m. and was called to order by the Speaker pro tempore (Mr. CUELLAR).

DESIGNATION OF SPEAKER PRO TEMPORE

The SPEAKER pro tempore laid before the House the following communication from the Speaker:

WASHINGTON, DC,
October 30, 2019.

I hereby appoint the Honorable HENRY CUELLAR to act as Speaker pro tempore on this day.

NANCY PELOSI,
Speaker of the House of Representatives.

MORNING-HOUR DEBATE

The SPEAKER pro tempore. Pursuant to the order of House of January 3, 2019, the Chair will now recognize Members from lists submitted by the majority and minority leaders for morning-hour debate.

The Chair will alternate recognition between the parties. All time shall be equally allocated between the parties, and in no event shall debate continue beyond 11:50 a.m. Each Member, other than the majority and minority leaders and the minority whip, shall be limited to 5 minutes.

DETERIORATING CONDITIONS AT THE MEXICAN BORDER

The SPEAKER pro tempore. The Chair recognizes the gentleman from Texas (Mr. VELA) for 5 minutes.

Mr. VELA. Mr. Speaker, last Friday, many of us attended the funeral for our colleague, Elijah Cummings. His story and the service were inspirational. On that same day, this article concerning the deteriorating conditions of the Mexican border appeared in The Texas Tribune about the consequences of the Trump administration's Migrant Protection Protocols, or MPP.

The article describes America's inhumanity unfolding in Matamoros, Mexico, a border town in which I, as a child, spent much of my time and in which my ancestors are buried. It is a story about America's cruelty, for which the President of the United States is directly responsible.

As I thought about what I could do about this situation, I couldn't help but ask myself: What would Elijah do?

By creating obstacle after obstacle, the Trump administration does everything within its power to prevent asylum claimants from having their rightful day in court, whether they are entitled to stay or not.

Its latest obstruction is the Migrant Protection Protocols, which are anything but protection. The MPP forces asylum claimants to wait in dangerous Mexican border towns as their claims are processed, and they have proven to be nothing more than a weapon used to destroy America's longstanding reputation as the world's greatest melting pot. It is a blatant violation of the due process clause of the U.S. Constitution.

Our Nation's asylum laws guarantee the right to live in the United States while claims are adjudicated. Over 1,500 people now live in squalor in Matamoros, Mexico. They have no running water and a marginal number of toilets for all of them. They are housed in tents and forced to bathe naked out in the Rio Grande River. Their daily subsistence depends on the goodness of the volunteers from the Rio Grande Valley and across this Nation who cross into Mexico every day to provide a simple meal. The conditions are worse than those that I have seen in Syrian refugee camps.

This is not the way America is supposed to work.

The administration claims that by creating secret, sham, tent courts along the border that it is processing asylum claims. This is nothing more than a glaring effort to obliterate due

process. In these so-called courts constitutional protections vanish, and civil liberties disappear.

The administration's policy is severely restricting and imposing barriers on the very fundamental bedrock of our legal system—the attorney-client relationship. Lawyers representing these asylum claimants are reporting that the MPP policy is making something as simple as the opportunity to meet with their client an impossibility. As of this August, less than 2 percent of those in MPP court even had lawyers representing them. The forcible removal of claimants to another country while they await adjudication is a judicial charade, represents a total abdication of the principles of fairness that are the foundations of our justice system, and makes a mockery of our Constitution.

Not only are asylum claimants being denied their rights, the public and the press are consistently denied access to these proceedings.

What is there to hide?

The presence of attorneys, advocates, the press, and the public at these hearings preserves our democracy. The president of the National Association of Immigration Judges states as follows:

Normal immigration court is open to the public. In civil proceedings in America, one of the fundamental tenets of our justice system is that there has to be accountability to the public. We do not do stuff behind closed doors. That is not what America is about. And yet, with each immigration policy decision the last 3 years, we are moving closer and closer to a model that does not resemble anything in the American judicial system; it is more like what you might see in China or Russia.

In our system of criminal jurisprudence, a person may be guilty, or they may not be. But with regard to jurisprudence, a party may be culpable or not culpable. But one thing everyone gets is the opportunity to be heard.

□ This symbol represents the time of day during the House proceedings, e.g., □ 1407 is 2:07 p.m.

Matter set in this typeface indicates words inserted or appended, rather than spoken, by a Member of the House on the floor.



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